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Re-Constructing Oedipus Through "Beauty and the Beast"

Once upon a time, there lived a rich merchant who gave his three sons and his three daughters the best money could buy . . . All the girls were very pretty, especially the youngest. When she was a baby, she was nick-named "Little Beauty," and the name stayed with her as she grew older. . . .

—"Beauty and the Beast"¹

The traditional narrative framework of the fairy tale has generated an ideologically potent mythology of moral exempla produced, as Angela Carter explains in her recent translation of some classic tales, especially for children who as "apprentice adults . . . will benefit from advice on how to charm, whom to trust, how to grow rich."² For centuries, through oral and written narratives, these tenacious "parables of instruction" have inculcated into Western society absolute representative patterns for growing up which are both products and producers of a pervasive ideological system that is deceptively simple in its fantasy, for apparently "children need only be 'good' in order to deserve happy endings."³

Film-maker Jean Cocteau, a translator like Carter of the traditional fairy tale narrative into not the textual medium but the filmic, envisioned fairy tale characters as "archetypes or stereotypes" which may be allowed "no subtle nuances between black and white, good and evil."⁴ And Cocteau's assessment is certainly historically accurate, for the narratives of these characters' lives have systematically codified socially acceptable parameters for individual behavior and experience, reinforcing essential sexual differences which are perpetuated by a cultural double standard of desire. Yet the seductively familiar, formulaic narrative repeatedly and successfully obscures the genre's inherent binarism of desire, glosses over the seemingly un-self-conscious gender bifurcation, and denies, in fact, the presence of any narrative—any personal, individual story—to the characters at all. Both the moral of the tale and the fate of the girls and boys loom large—not just once, but upon every time.

This social scenario of reward based on essential goodness presents

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an essential problem, particularly for the "girls" seeking their own stories and experiences other than those which literature and history has proffered to them. There is a heavy-handed evaluative double standard operating in the fairy tale, on the general level of representation and in regard to the specific level of that "moral" which positions the female character, and hence the subject-seeking female reader, at the definitional mercy of the dominant culture's inscribing pen. The central female of "Beauty and the Beast" manifests a particular brand of this essential prescriptiveness; as Carter explains it, "Beauty's happiness is founded on her abstract quality of virtue": the moral "is all to do with something indefinable, not with 'doing well,' but with 'being good.'"⁵ That "indefinable" quality of "virtue" is really quite clear, however, in the endless re-inscription of what has always already been: "The end of a fairy story is the end of a fairy story," as Cocteau explains the fate of his filmic heroine; "Beauty is docile."⁶

In *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Teresa de Lauretis traces the "mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text" back to what has been a sort of Ur-story on which Western culture has built and bifurcated its society, and hence its fictions, of sexual differences—the myth of Oedipus.⁷ She summarizes this basic narrative paradigm of Oedipus as "a passage, a transformation predicated on the figure of a hero, the mythic subject"⁸—"hero" being itself marked, in a sense, for gender and thus already excluding women from its central narrative position. Thus, the narrative fixity of women in fairy tales falls into peripheral positions which are either undesirable in their extremities or contradictory in their desirability. Or, as Ellen Cronan Rose has succinctly observed, the list of possible positionalities available to the female reader has been consolidated to only a select few: "madonnas and whores, saints and witches, good little girls and wicked queens."⁹

Since the controlling narrative paradigm maps difference and desire, as de Lauretis describes it, predominantly "from the point of view of Oedipus . . . that of masculine desire,"¹⁰ traditional narrative has literally en-culturated the sexual binary into restrictive, pre-determined representations and positionalities of "acceptable" behavior and desire—for the female character/reader: goodness, purity, docility. And under the rubric of the Oedipal myth, woman's story is/can be only man's story—which is, after all, the same old story. In other words, no story. De Lauretis explains this woman's dilemma as Other in Oedipal narrative in, appropriately enough, a fairy tale

frame of reference: "The end of the girl's journey, if successful, will bring her to the place where the boy will find her, like Sleeping Beauty, awaiting him, Prince Charming. . . . Thus the itinerary of the female's journey . . . so her story, like any other story, is a question of his desire."¹¹

That the narrative grip of Oedipus is difficult to break free from is evinced, certainly, by the tenacity of those revered fairy tales which have hooked into our cultural ideology, and also by what in the past has been a marked absence of narratives which work to disrupt the status quo. Yet such resistant, cross-grain re-writing is precisely the task of Angela Carter, whose feminist revisionary rewriting of some of those classic fairy tales is, as Lorna Sage has described her work, more concerned with "myth-breaking" than "myth-making"—re-writing which "take[s] myths and turn[s] them inside out."¹²

In *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter proffers two versions of the classic tale "Beauty and the Beast." One version, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," a hip, contemporary '60s-style parody featuring a cigarette-smoking Beauty, is an overt expose of the contrived gender differences and positionalities that inform the original tale. In the companion piece, "The Tiger's Bride," Carter takes her re-visioning a crucial step further, subverting "that old story" by re-positioning and re-defining woman's desire on her own terms. Carter's imaginative conceptions and formulations of what sorts of possibilities are available to women through cultural myths are a far cry, certainly, from those of Oedipus, which are, as de Lauretis explains, "honed by a centuries-long patriarchal tradition."¹³ In fact, these iconoclastic, tradition-breaking tales—especially "The Tiger's Bride"—do precisely what de Lauretis argues feminist writing and re-writing must do to subvert the continued predominance of the pattern of the Oedipal narrative: Woman—Beauty—is imagined/imagined as "mythical and social subject" in her own right, providing her own referential frame of experience, writing her ending to her own story.¹⁴

"To a certain extent," Carter acknowledges regarding the foregrounding of a political agenda in her work, "I'm making a conscious critique of the culture I was born to."¹⁵ And to the extent that we read her narrative revisions as critiques of the dominant culture's inscriptions of sexual difference and desire, it is interesting and illuminating to read Carter's "Beauty" stories against Jean Cocteau's classic 1946 film text, *La Belle et La Bête*, which has always been studied as an experimental, avant-garde venture into the possibilities of cinematic production, yet which is nevertheless as familiar a rendering of the

fairy story as Carter's versions are de-familiar ones. Cocteau's film text is, obviously, a product of a different era than Carter's texts; yet it can be and must be studied as an equally powerful and persuasive vehicle for the re-inscribing of the values of the dominant culture—those same gender positionalities represented in the original fairy tale. For, like written narrative, as de Lauretis has pointed out, (culturally) dominant cinema, too, "works for Oedipus."¹⁶

Of course, filmic narratives have a singular advantage and seductive appeal over written ones; as Seymour Chatman has reminded us, "Seeing is, after all, believing."¹⁷ Laura Mulvey and other film critics have defined scopophilia as a primary cinematic technique for inscribing gender differences and mapping desire.¹⁸ And *La Belle et La Bête* very much solicits looking, for it is replete with fantastic and unexpected magic: Beauty's tears materialize as diamonds, rugs unroll up stairs, the trees surrounding the Beast's castle keep watch as sentinels, candelabra are held and wine is poured by dis-embodied arms and hands. The most pervasive and compelling visual lure, of course, is Beauty herself, the female object of difference designed to the traditional specifications of masculine desire. Beautiful, blond, ethereal, she is typically a classic representation of the ways in which "woman is to be looked at" as well as her "to-be-looked-at-ness."¹⁹ And by appropriating her beauty, both the traditional, moral "off-screen" attributes of the "good little girl" and the on-screen physical beauty of actress Josette Day, Cocteau shows us a cinematic projection of woman defined by masculine desire through means of conventional cinematic codes—the dominant social human nature of the on-screen interactions between Beauty and the Beast, the appropriation of the female body as the beast/male's possession—and extra-cinematic ones—the gender representations and narrative resolutions (the "happily-ever-after")—that the traditional reading of the fairy tale has instructed him to re-inscribe.

Cocteau in *La Belle et La Bête* works from the same original source as does Carter in her versions: Madame Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1757 fairy tale.²⁰ The narrative in "Beauty and the Beast" is, essentially, the boy-meets-girl love story, a too-familiar story line which unfolds with striking parallels to de Lauretis' Oedipal paradigm. The opening lines introduce the Merchant and list his prized possessions, signaling immediately that, although Beauty is given top billing in the title, this tale is actually not even her story. And when all is decided and done, the Beast/Prince informs Beauty somewhat indifferently, "A bad fairy condemned me to the Beast's shape until I

found a beautiful girl who would agree to marry me."²¹ His desire has not really been for her as individual human at all but, rather, only as generic female.

From the beginning of the tale, Beauty is doomed to be female "other," running the gamut in assuming various traditional female roles yet really changing very little as a character. Beauty is indeed a character type—or, more accurately, several character types; she is inscribed, in de Lauretis' terms, as a "literary topos" through which "the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning."²² In order to satisfy the controlling male desire of the narrative, to facilitate his "happy ending," Beauty is variously, and often simultaneously, in the problematic but traditional situation of being: the ideal wife—she refuses suitors because "she could not possibly abandon her father in his misfortune" and thus must "console him and toil beside him" (p. 46); mother/care-giver—she "got up at four in the morning, cleaned the house and got their dinners ready" (p. 46); sibling—"she wished her sisters well although they hated her" (p. 50); and sacrifice—"If the Beast will take a daughter instead of the father, then I shall gladly go" (p. 50). She is both object of barter and plot device: "I would like to forgive you," the Beast negotiates with her father, "but only on this condition, that one of your daughters comes here of her own free will, to die in your place" (p. 49). And ultimately, expectedly, she is consummately guilty, somehow to blame for the fate both of her father—"Take your roses, Beauty. They cost your father very dearly" (p. 50)—and of the Beast: "You forgot your promise to me. When you did not come back to me, I could not eat, and now I am dying, Beauty" (p. 60).

The story's controlling male desire, implicit in that privileged point of view, is intensified in the film, for the omniscient look of the camera conspires with the voyeurism already inherent in the narrative itself to implicate even the viewer as silent, passive observer of the Beast's manipulations of Beauty's person and her will. The Beast's questioning of Beauty—"May I sit here and watch you eat your supper?"—is a moot one, for he is as undeniably "master" of his own house as she is mastered by the controlling desire of the film narrative. Repeatedly framed by the "look" of the camera, Beauty is presented as an object to be observed/looked at by the cinematic iconography with which Cocteau constructs the film. In the opening scenes, for instance, in attempting to seduce a kiss from the reluctant, uninterested Beauty, Avenant bends over her as she kneels to scrub the floor, pinning her between his body and the dis-embodied image

of his face reflected in the waxed floor beneath her; when she stands to turn away, he pinions her body against his with an arrow. (She only successfully escapes from this "frame" due to the unexpected arrival of her father in the room below.)

Likewise, the Beast constantly captures Beauty in his gaze, for it is primarily through his eyes that her story is filmed. He stands behind her chair, peeping over her shoulder, seeing her—as the spectator sees her—while she sees nothing but the table before her; he peers at her from a hidden vantage point while she is in his garden; and his image over-fills the screen and becomes her waking vision as he leans over the unconscious Beauty in her bed. He "sees" her, even, when she is absent from the line of his vision, for as omnipotent master, his omniscient eye frames her to physical advantage in doorways and on staircases as she moves through his house.

This voyeuristic perspective insinuates itself most familiarly and climatically in that most personal and intimate of chambers, Beauty's bedroom, which becomes the scene of the most masterful bit of construction by the camera (and by the Beast). In a dramatic, tightly edited sequence of close-up shots, the camera literally cuts Beauty's body into sections as the Beast carries her from the anteroom into her bedroom after she faints at the sight of him. Through a series of alternating shots created by a spliced sequence of frames from anterior and interior vantage points, Beauty's metamorphosis from the father's daughter to the Beast's consort occurs with stark deliberation, foreshadowing the final shift in roles that will make her Prince Charming's wife: she is un-dressed of the coarse, modest garments that positioned her in her former role and re-dressed in the virginal, luxurious gown that marks her as well-kept possession of the Beast/master. Silently, rapidly, her body is appropriated by the camera as her will is appropriated by the Beast; and her new life as mistress of the Beast is spliced together for her, according to the controlling cinematic narrative masculine gaze.

The focus of all this looking is, of course, Beauty herself. Her name, acquired as a child because she was "very pretty," functions as metaphor for her worth as person in the narrative—Beauty/beauty is indeed somehow inextricably linked to goodness—and as metonym for her imaging in the film, reflecting the double standards of desire and expectations according to gender which operate explicitly in Cocteau's work. The Beauty of the written text comes to accept and love the Beast as he physically is: "A woman doesn't need a handsome face and a clever tongue in a husband. She needs strength of charac-

ter, goodness, and kindness. And these the Beast has, all three" (p. 60). And, of course, in the film she comes similarly to this realization, although without even so many words to soften the blow. Yet in both texts/contexts, without her beauty, Beauty is, apparently, nothing. The camera presents little else of her as an individual being besides her physical appearance: virtually every shot fetishizes her wide-eyed, smooth-skinned face and the halo of "golden" hair. Her female form is indeed her essence, her totality, for when the Prince marries Beauty, they are magically granted that state of "happily ever after, in a contentment perfect because it was founded on goodness" (p. 60)—founded, in fact, on Beauty's beauty.

That trite, story-book ending is perhaps the most unsatisfying and unrealistic aspect of this, and any, fairy tale. And the ending series of images with which Cocteau closes his film is perhaps the most blatant, heavy-handed and thus disturbing sequence of construction in the entire work, for it is rendered as something of a joke at women's expense. Cocteau commented in the *Diary* of the film: the resurrected Prince Charming, who emerges as the Beast is shaken off, "looks extraordinarily like Avenant," Beauty's earlier aggressive suitor; and this Prince-cum-Beast-Cum-Avenant "worries Beauty. She seems to miss the kind Beast a little, and to be a little afraid of this unexpected Avenant."²³ Yet after only a moment's hesitation, as the established filmic framework has led us to anticipate, Beauty melts into Prince Charming's arms and, with glowing face and eyes, tells him, "I'd like to be . . . with you." This trade-off, Beast for Prince, which is effected without her consent, is explicit in the "happy ending" it intends. Her desires are, in fact, doubly discounted, for despite her requisite self-sacrifice, Beauty doesn't get what/whom she bargained for. The "Prince with three faces"²⁴ with whom she flies away is a composite of the single, inescapable face of the patriarchal culture which has made her, inscribed her—Avenant, Beast, Prince Charming, father, lord. And even her physical presence as determinate of identity is compromised—indeed, revoked, for the last image the spectator sees is the Prince's smiling face; Beauty's back, encircled by the Prince's arms, is turned to face the camera. In *La Belle et La Bête*, her story once again turns into his story; the narrative ending has been pre-staged, pre-determined by the Oedipal constructs of the genre and the media even before the narrative discourse begins.

In *La Belle et La Bête*, the narrative tradition which inscribed, and which subsequently is inscribed by, the classic fairy tale remains unaltered in the end and is seemingly to be preserved at all costs; no

questions asked. Angela Carter, however, sets out to count those costs and to ask some of those questions in her perverse, satirical versions of the classic fairy tale. "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," written from the same omniscient point of view as is her source, keeps the original plot more or less intact; hence, ostensibly Oedipus is still at work. But a principle deviation Carter makes from the original, and one which facilitates her breaking away from Oedipus, concerns the time frame of the story. The setting is twentieth-century England, and the tensions which Carter exposes as the modern Beauty confronts the archaic social systems still at work in her contemporary world construct a more overt critique of those systems—represented here more by the Beast even than by Beauty's father—than either traditional narrative or dominant cinematic versions have heretofore discovered.

In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," Beauty replays the typical patterning of female roles—daughter, mother, even wife (her father calls home to say he'll be late for dinner)—until finally she accepts her allotted place at Mr. Lyon's side, thereby balancing a social system initially disrupted when "her birth killed her mother."²⁵ As in the original version, male experience is privileged and the masculine domain is foregrounded; the title, in fact, is completely his, without the mention of her at all. The Beast's materialism bespeaks a certain luxury and camaraderie reserved, apparently, for the Masters of society; his estate, "a place of privilege," is "plainly that of an exceedingly wealthy man" (p. 42). And a certain duplicity exists between the Beast and Beauty's father, for both are indeed accustomed to being masters, possessors of beautiful and valuable things; the Beast, upon seeing Beauty framed in a photograph, recognizes and desires her because of a "certain look" that the camera had "captured" (p. 44). This proprietary conspiracy among masters is apparently nothing new to Beauty, and she acquiesces willingly yet ruefully, "with a pang of dread" but with little surprise that she is the token of barter offered to the Beast: "the price of her father's good fortune . . . on some magically reciprocal scale" (p. 45).

That the Beast and Beauty's father inhabit the same gender-privileged realm is reinforced throughout the narrative by the increasingly blurred lines of demarcation between animal and man. Mr. Lyon is distinguished perhaps most obviously from a mere animal by the socially stratifying title of "Sir" which precedes his name; and he is something of a gentleman's intellectual, able to converse with Beauty about "the nature of the moon . . . about the stars . . . about the vari-

able transformation of the weather" (p. 47). Beauty's sense of obligation to this Beast is a familiar one: she is still passive, the virginal object of barter—a "young girl who looked as if she had been carved out of a single pearl" (p. 46)—who "stayed, and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so" (p. 45). And although she realizes her fate as "Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial" (p. 45), she herself expedites the process, offering herself to the Beast almost in desperation, as if she fears not being taken otherwise. Beauty returns to find this Beast dying not in nature but in his "modest bedroom" (which, with only "a nightlight on the mantelpiece, no curtains at the windows, no carpet on the floor" is, surely, in need of a woman's touch [p. 50]); the scene is replete with sexual overtones: "She flung herself upon him, so that the iron bedstead groaned, and covered his poor paws with kisses. 'Don't die, Beast! If you'll have me, I'll never leave you'" (p. 50–51). Carter ironically and explicitly implies that, sans Beast, this Beauty, too, is somehow not completely Beauty, for she is not possessed of that desirable goodness: left on her own in London, for instance, Beauty's "pearly skin . . . was plumping out, a little, with high living and compliments . . . her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterized certain pampered exquisite, expensive cats" (p. 40).

Beauty's fate is indeed that of a "kept," pampered woman; but her keeper must be, it seems, only the Beast and not merely herself. Her constructed space at his estate is comfortable and opulent but well-defined and artificial, a bedroom with "precious books and pictures and the flowers grown by invisible gardeners in the Beast's hothouse" (p. 46). She has everything she could possibly need, the narrative implies—everything but a sense of her own identity and a story of her own. The pattern of Oedipus emerges most fully in the closing scene, for although she has made the sacrifice, it is his desires that are fulfilled. And under the "soft transformation" of her silent tears, the Beast comes into his proper, formerly hidden, manly self: "a man with an unkept mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all the beasts" (p. 51). Ironically, Carter ascribes the last words of this text to Mr. Lyon, rapidly re-inscribing Beauty back into her womanly supporting role. The story ends, but the ideology of the narrative continues; and under the patronymic of the masterful Beast, "Mr. and Mrs. Lyon walk in the garden" (p. 51)—happily, ever after.

"My father lost me to The Beast at cards."²⁶ So begins "The Tiger's

Bride," which follows thematically on the heels of "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" yet is a striking departure from—indeed a cross-grain re-reading of—"Mr. Lyon." By appropriating the personal voice, the girl in this second tale not only takes charge of telling the narrative of her life, and consequently of the narrative traditions of the fairy tale, but she also makes clear from the start that what blame there is to be assigned lies not with her but with the dominant systems to which she is only a bargaining chip. This Beauty has shaken both the name—she is referred to only as "the girl," "the young lady"—and the consequent sexually-specific images that are intertwined with it: she is not so delicate and feminine "a pearl" who easily capitulates but a darker, stronger, more resilient "woman of honor" (p. 59) who ably watches out after herself because no one else will. And in carving out her own life-story, in resisting the story which literary and cultural traditions have patterned for her, her narrative becomes an alternative model for the female subject's desire, constructing what de Lauretis says feminist cinematic and written narrative must: "the terms of reference of another measure of desire and the conditions of visibility for a different social subject."²⁷

"The Tiger's Bride," like the original "Beauty and the Beast," is a narrative which is inherently voyeuristic; the terms of looking, however, are significantly altered, for the girl is subject of the [her] gaze as well as object of the [his, the tiger's] gaze. The girl's desires seem to hark back to a primal and natural state, literally and metaphorically—one that is pre-Oedipal, almost pre-ideological, prior to the time it became "not natural for humankind to go naked" (p. 66). And the tiger's request, "to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress" (p. 58), is so shocking and untenable to her because to comply she must throw off the familiar ideological constructs and patterns that have so comfortably clothed and covered over her own unexpressed sexual desires that she realizes not that she even possesses them: "'Take off my clothes for you, like a ballet girl? Is that all you want of me?' . . . That he should want so little was the reason why I could not give it" (p. 61).

The transformation in "The Tiger's Bride" indeed centers on the girl, not The Beast, thus presenting a narrative challenge to the Oedipal myth that, as de Lauretis describes such re-patterning, "represent[s] not just the power of female desire, but its duplicity and ambivalence" (p. 154). This female subject is not so readily categorized as her fictional predecessors; she is, in fact, the antithesis of Mrs. Lyon who was "possessed of a sense of obligation" that sub-

sumed her own will ("Lyon," p. 45). The girl knows, moreover, what she does not want—to be passively passed, like her mother before her, from one player to another in the hegemonic power game: "My mother did not blossom long; bartered for her dowry . . ." (p. 52). Precisely what it is that she does want, however, she does not know, for like the white rose The Beast gives to her, she is herself "unnatural, out of season" (p. 53). And her ripping apart of the rose "petal by petal" portends the un-layering to which she will subject herself in order to discover the potential of her heretofore unconsidered, unexplored sexual self. Actively initiating herself into the dominant discourse, she bargains with the status quo to redeem her story and her subjectivity on her own terms. This time it is she who picks the rose at her father's request, implicating his carelessness in her fate: "When I break off a stem, I prick my finger and so he gets his rose all smeared with blood" (p. 55).

Not only is this girl not your typical Beauty; neither does she face the typical Beast. Just as she is entrapped in an unfamiliar land—demographically, and also socially, sexually—so he is encased in an unfamiliar skin; and, ill-fitted for traditional roles, both are outsiders because of their differences. Unlike his fictional predecessors, or the "tiger-man" of the old wives' tale who wore a "'big black travelling cloak lined with fur, just like your daddy's'" (p. 56), the Beast of this story is indeed more animal than man, bearing "an odd air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would far rather drop down on all fours" (p. 53), and searching not for personal luxury or social status in the "vast-man trap" of his palazzo—but "solitude" (p. 57). He never desires to alter his nature permanently, and his temporary attempts at a false disguise cause him to appear a garish parody of the beast in humans that is so thinly and disingenuously covered: "I never saw a man look so two-dimensional He wears a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it. Oh, yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human: one profile of his mask is the mirror image of the other, too perfect, uncanny" (p. 53). Never in complicity with the dominant, oppressive ideology, The Beast in fact stands directly opposed to it, taking issue against its double standards and short-sightedness and acquiring the girl not out of a selfish desire to save (or serve) himself, but because she, like he, is different, a rarity—to him, a thing unknown, a non-pearl of great price: "If you are so careless of your treasures," he growls at her father, "you should expect them to be taken from you" (p. 55).

The Beast's very otherness is what intrigues the girl in the first place. Like her, beneath the constructed facade of his social appearance, he seems to be seeking self-knowledge, self-fulfillment of some sort—a commonality she senses she shares with The Beast yet cannot name: "it cannot be his face that looks like mine" (p. 56). Her sympathy and inclination toward other than what society has dictated must be signals her own difference and surfaces explicitly in her natural affinity for the little black gelding, "the noblest of creatures": "I lirrurped and hurrumphed to my shining black companion and he acknowledged my greeting with a kiss on the forehead from his soft lips" (p. 62). And it is when she recognizes that she and The Beast are (in their silence) "speaking" the same speech of difference—a relationship to which there are no ideological strings of social/sexual expectation attached—that she feels "at liberty for the first time in [her] life" (p. 64). In both bearing her gaze and forcing her to look upon his natural nakedness, The Beast consequently brings her to a clear seeing of herself—or at least, a clear seeing of her desire to better "see," to know, herself: "I felt my breast ripped apart as if I suffered a marvellous wound" (p. 64).

The sacrifice in "The Tiger's Bride"—if indeed there is a sacrifice at all—is his, for ultimately he asks her to do nothing for him that he has not done for her. Because "nothing about him reminded [her] of humanity" (p. 64)—physically, intellectually—she undresses for him, consummating the reciprocal relationship of desire and trust, not with words, but with the equal, non-differentiating, illuminating gaze that makes her subject, not just object, and makes a place for her desire—the multiple sexual subjectivity she has experienced and embraced: "[His tongue,] abrasive as sandpaper, ripped off skin after skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur" (p. 67). And her final act, the sleight-of-hand substitution of the maid, the "marvellous machine," marks a significant break with the past in favor of her emerging personal, female desires; for with this simulacrum of woman, she effects both a deliberate completion of her own story on her own terms and handily interrupts the old story of female goodness and fidelity: "I will dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to perform the part of my father's daughter" (p. 65).

In "real life," the conflictive beast woman must confront is, of course, not a representative tiger but the literal social/sexual limitations society ideologically imposes. In "The Tiger's Bride," Carter

does rethink social/sexual stereotypes and re-cast the direction fairy tales may take in our culture, but her heroine bucks a tremendous tradition of literary representation and cultural ideology—a tradition that does not lightly permit a ready escape, for Oedipus still looms large. Carter's re-routing of the same old narrative paradigm is remarkable in one sense, for if the trend of recent video productions is indicative, such tradition-breaking re-visioning of fairy tale myth is, to a large extent, apparently still culturally cross-grain, especially in media produced for popular audiences. Since *La Belle et La Bête*, for example, there have been several re-makes of "Beauty and the Beast," ranging from Disney cartoons to pornographic productions. All of these re-makes, however, have basically reiterated the traditional social/sexual patterns and representations, with only slight variations on the essential theme of female beauty = essential goodness. One, a 1987 Golan-Globus musical production directed by Eugene Marner, constructs a more matriarchal Beauty who sits opposite her father at the family dinner table, ordering and orchestrating her family members' lives: "What," they sing, "would we do without you?" Beauty has evolved little as a subject within this film or from previous versions, like Cocteau's: she is still most animated when the Beast joins her at dinner—"May I serve you, Beast?"—and again readily capitulates to his marriage proposal as a means of self-completion; her acceptance is based solely upon her romantic assessment of his situation; unlike her family, as she tells him, "You need me." And in this film the voyeuristic aspect of the narrative is even more pervasive than in Cocteau's, for the Beast knows always what Beauty is thinking; he is inside her mind, he peoples her dreams, granting her every wish, instructing her how to love him—"See with your heart," he sings to her—while constructing her as his ideal lover.

There is also the highly-rated television series "Beauty and the Beast," which features a sexually charged, although never physically consummated, fairy-tale romance. Here the Beast is incarnated as a handsome, selfless, multilingual "man" named Vincent who quotes Shakespeare in a soft-spoken yet wise and authoritative voice of experience. In contrast, "Beauty," an independent, gutsy, Lois-Lane-with-a-heart woman named Catharine, dauntlessly spouts moral platitudes from beneath a halo of blond hair, yet always ultimately defers to Vincent's other-worldly wisdom in matters great and small. Set in contemporary New York, this pair fights modern evils, always putting others before themselves; consequently, their relationship never develops or changes because they share "a bond of friendship

stronger than love"—a self-subsuming bond of almost slavish attraction which is mysterious yet insatiable in its demands upon the other's attentions. It is unclear just who has redeemed whom in this paradigm—much less what new positionalities it could possibly be offering—for both Catharine and Vincent are pretty well mired in the romantic scenarios and idealisms the production constructs around them—a relationship too good to be true but, apparently, just right for prime-time TV and the same old story it intends to convey.

Margaret Atwood has written in her *Circe/Mud Poems*: "It's the story that counts. No use telling me this isn't a story or not the same story. . . . The story is ruthless."²⁸ And the continuing production and passive acceptance of the familiar stories in written and filmic narratives, especially through readily accessible popular cultural media models based on the traditional standards of sexual difference and masculine desire, are disturbing and motivating reminders that those traditions must be subverted, those stories must be retold. To tell a different story, to imagine and construct otherness as positive not negative difference, and to offer positive positionalities for identification within that otherness, to disrupt the ideological status quo enough to disturb the heretofore complacent acceptance it has met among readers and viewers; such is precisely the work of Carter's fairy tale narratives. For from the simplistic level of the fairy tale to the material complexities of narrative cinema, the story of Oedipus and the narratives of his standard-bearers must be actively re-examined and openly challenged—as shown particularly both by Cocteau, in his reinscriptions of them, and by Carter, in her shattering of them. De Lauretis argues that the best work in and the acceptable agenda for re-writing and re-making contemporary narrative is and can only be "narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance,"²⁹ an argument which we in our readings and writings must extend, as Carter has done in her revisionary work, in order to set the socio-cultural stage for new narrative traditions, granting voice and place, subjectivity and desire to a different female social subject, according to other than the same old story.

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Notes

1. Angela Carter (trans.), *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favorite Fairy Tales* (New York: Schocken, 1989), p. 45.

2. Carter, *Sleeping Beauty*, p. 125.
3. Carter, *Sleeping Beauty*, p. 125.
4. Jean Cocteau, "Beauty and the Beast": *Diary of a Film* (1947; New York: Dover, 1972), p. iv.
5. Carter, *Sleeping Beauty*, p. 128.
6. Cocteau, p. 3.
7. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1984), Univ. Press, p. 121.
8. De Lauretis, p. 113.
9. Ellen Cronan Rose, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales," in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 1983), p. 211.
10. De Lauretis, p. 107.
11. De Lauretis, p. 133.
12. Lorna Sage, "The Savage Sideshow: A Profile of Angela Carter," *New Review*, 39/40 (1977), 56.
13. De Lauretis, p. 125.
14. De Lauretis, p. 131.
15. Sage, p. 56.
16. De Lauretis, p. 153.
17. Seymour Chapman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)," *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 128.
18. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16 (1975), 19.
19. Mulvey, p. 17.
20. Carter's translation of de Beaumont's fairy tales appear in *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favorite Fairy Tales*, and it is her version of "Beauty and the Beast" to which I refer throughout this essay.
21. Carter, *Sleeping Beauty*, p. 61; emphasis mine. Subsequent quotations from "Sleeping Beauty" will be documented in the main text.
22. De Lauretis, p. 109.
23. Cocteau, p. 3.
24. Cocteau, p. 3.
25. Angela Carter, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 48. Subsequent quotations from "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" will be documented in the main text.
26. Angela Carter, "The Tiger's Bride," *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 51. Subsequent quotations from "The Tiger's Bride" will be documented in the main text.
27. De Lauretis, p. 155.
28. Margaret Atwood, *Circe/Mud Poems*, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, eds. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 2298.
29. DeLauretis, p. 157.